The WOMAN IN THE ALCOVE

JENNETTE LEE

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To Lethia.
from Ruth
Christmas 1915

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THE WOMAN IN THE ALCOVE

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Wrapped in the coat, she seemed for a moment the woman of the alcove [*Page* 103]

THE WOMAN IN THE ALCOVE

BY

JENNETTE LEE

ILLUSTRATED BY A. I. KELLER
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TO

GERALD STANLEY LEE

"I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!"

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Wrapped in the coat, she seemed for a moment the woman of the alcove . *Frontispiece*

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She seemed to sit in a dream 10

She was weeping, deep silent sobs 40

So she was like this—very still and happy—and he was shut out 108

I

"Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her—
Next time, herself!—not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew;
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

II

"Yet the day wears
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune—
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! She goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares?
But 'tis twilight, you see—with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune."

I

ELDRIDGE WALCOTT paused in front of the great building; he looked up and hesitated and went in. He crossed the marble lobby and passed through the silent, swinging doors on the opposite side and stepped into a softly lighted café. He had never been in Merwin's before, though he had often heard of it, and he was curious as to what it would be like. There was a sound of music somewhere and low voices and the tinkle of silver and glass behind the little green curtains. He entered an alcove at the left and sat down. The restfulness of the place

soothed him, and he sat listening to the distant music and looking out between the parted curtains of the alcove to the room with its little tables filling the space beyond the green-curtained alcoves on either side and the people seated at the tables. They were laughing and eating and talking and drinking from delicate cups or turning slender-stemmed glasses in their fingers as they talked. Beyond the tables rose a small platform; a woman had just mounted it and was bowing to the scattered tables. The sound of voices ceased an instant and hands clapped faintly here and there. The woman on the platform bowed again and looked at the accompanist, who struck the opening bars. It was a light, trivial song with more personality than art

in the singing of it, and the audience applauded perfunctorily, hardly breaking off its talk to acknowledge that it was done. The woman stepped down from the platform and joined a group at a table near by, and waiters moved among the tables, refilling cups and glasses and taking orders.

A waiter paused by the alcove where Eldridge Walcott was sitting and pushed back the little curtain and looked in and waited. Eldridge took up the card on the table before him; he fingered it a little awkwardly and laid it down. "Bring me cigars," he said.

The waiter scribbled on a card and passed on. When he had completed the alcoves on the left he turned and went back along the right, pausing be-

fore each one and bending forward to listen and take the order on his card. As he approached the third alcove he pushed back the curtain that half concealed it at the back and bent forward. When he passed on the curtain did not fall into place; it remained caught on the back of the seat. From where Eldridge sat he could see the woman seated in the alcove. She was alone, her back to him, her head a little bent as if in thought.

He glanced at her carelessly and along the row of green curtains to the tables beyond. It was all much as he had imagined it — a place where one could spend time and money without too much exertion. It was the money part of it that interested Eldridge. His client had asked him to look into

it for him as an investment, and he had decided on this informal way of appraising it. To-morrow he was to go over the books and accounts. The owners wanted a stiff price for the good-will. It was probably worth what they were asking he decided as he watched the careless, happy crowd. People who came here were not thinking how much they could save. . . . It was not the sort of place he should care to come to often himself. Life to Eldridge was a serious, drab affair compared with Merwin's. He liked to think how much he could save; and when he had saved it he liked to invest it where it would breed more. . . . He might take a few shares of the capital stock himself — his client had suggested it.

The waiter brought the cigars and Eldridge lighted one and leaned back, smoking and enjoying the relaxed air of the place. He could understand dimly how people liked this sort of thing and would come day after day for music and talk and the purposelessness of it all; it was a kind of huge, informal club with a self-elected membership.

As a prospective investor the charm of it pleased him. They ought to be able to make a good thing of it. He fell to making little calculations; it was part of his power as a successful man of business that he understood detail and the value of small things.

He was not a financier, but he handled small interests well and he had built up a comfortable fortune. From

being in debt before he married, he had advanced slowly until now his investments made a good showing. He could probably live on the income to-morrow if he chose. . . . He blew a little ring of smoke. . . . His investments and what they were mounting to was a kind of epic poem to Eldridge's slow-moving mind. . . . Yes — he would take a few shares of the café stock. He looked thoughtfully at his cigar and calculated how many, and what they would be worth. . . . The music had taken the form of a young boy with a violin who stood absorbed in his playing, a kind of quick fervor in his face and figure. The voices had ceased and only now and then a cup clicked.

Eldridge lifted his eyes from the

cigar. The woman in the alcove had moved nearer the end of the seat and was watching the boy, her lips parted on a half smile.

The cigar dropped from Eldridge's fingers. He stared at the woman — stared — and stirred vaguely.

She turned a little and Eldridge reached out his hand and drew a quick curtain between them.

Through the slit he could still see the figure of the woman, her head thrown a little back, her eyes following the bow of music as it rose and fell, and the lips smiling in happy content — He drew a quick breath.

Slowly a deep flush came into his face — How dared Rosalind come here! It was a respectable place — of course — but how dared she spend

her time and money — his money and time that belonged to her home and her children — in a place like this? . . . Her hands were folded in her lap, and her eyes followed the music.

She had barely touched the glass on the table before her, he noted, or the plate of little biscuit. She seemed to sit in a dream. . . . His mind whirled. Six hours before he had said good-by to her at the breakfast table — a plain, drab woman in shabby clothes, with steel-rimmed spectacles that looked at him with a little line between the eyes and reminded him that he needed to order coal for the range and a new clothes-line. . . . He had ordered the coal, but he recalled suddenly that he had forgotten the clothes-line; he had intended to see if he could get one

cheaper at a wholesale place he knew of; his memory held the clothes-line fast in the left lobe of his brain while the grey matter of the right lobe whirled excitedly about the woman in the alcove.

She had raised a lorgnette to her eyes and was looking at the boy violinist, a little, happy, wistful smile on her lips. . . . Eldridge had not seen her smile like that for years. His left lobe abandoned the clothes-line and recalled to him when it was he saw the little smile, half wistful, half happy, on her face. . . . They were standing by the gate, and he was saying good night; the moon had just come up, and there was a fragrant bush beside the path that gave out the smell of spring; the left lobe yielded up fra-

She seemed to sit in a dream

grance and moonlight and the little wistful smile while his quick eye followed the lorgnette; it had dropped to her lap, and her hands were folded on it. . . . Rosalind — ! A gold lorgnette — and draperies, soft, gauzy lines and folds of silk — and a hat on her shining, lifted hair, like a vague coronet! Eldridge Walcott held his cigar grimly between his teeth; the cigar had gone out — both lobes had ceased to whirl. . . . A kind of frozen light held his face. His hand groped for his hat. Why should he not step across the aisle and sit down in the chair opposite her and confront her? — the green curtains would shut them in. . . . Both lobes stared at the thought and held it tight — to face Rosalind, a grey, frightened woman in her fin-

ery, behind the little green curtains! He shook himself loose and stood up. Softly his hand drew back the curtain, and he stepped out. They were clapping the boy violinist, who had played to the end, and Eldridge moved toward the swinging doors and passed out and stood in the lobby. He wiped his forehead. . . . A sound of moving chairs came from behind the doors, and he crossed the lobby quickly and plunged into the crowd. It was five o'clock, and the streets were filled with people hurrying home. Eldridge turned against the tide and crossed a side street and pressed east, his feet seeming to find a way of their own. He was not thinking where he would go — except that it must be away from her. He could not face her yet —

Who *was* she? There was the drab woman of the morning, waiting for him to come home with the clothes-line, and there was the woman of the alcove, splendid, gentle, with the little smile and the gold lorgnette. . . . Rosalind — Fifteen years he had lived with her, and he had known her ten years before that — there was nothing *queer* about Rosalind! He lifted his head a little proudly — The woman he had just left was very beautiful! It struck him for the first time that she was beautiful, and he half stopped.

He walked more slowly, taking it in — Rosalind was not beautiful; she had not been beautiful — even as a girl — only pretty, with a kind of freshness and freedom about her and something in her eyes that he had not under-

stood — It was the look that had drawn him —

He was always wondering about it. Sometimes he saw it in the night — as if it flitted when he woke. He had not thought of it for years. Something in the woman's shoulder and the line of her head was like it. But the woman was very *beautiful!* — Suppose it were not Rosalind after all! He gave a quick breath, and his feet halted and went on. Then a thought surged at him, and he walked fast — he almost ran. No — No —! It was as if he put his hands over his ears to shut it out. Other women — but not *his* wife! She had children — *three* children! He tried to think of the children to steady himself. He pictured her putting them to bed at

night, bending above Tommie and winding a flannel bandage tight around his throat for croup; he could see her quite plainly, the quick, efficient fingers and firm, roughened hands drawing the bed-clothes in place and tucking them in. . . . The woman's hands had rested so quietly in her lap! Were they rough? — She had worn gloves — he remembered now — soft gloves, like the color in her gown. . . . He stared at the gloves — they were long — they came to the elbow — yes, there was a kind of soft, lacy stuff that fell away from them — yes, they were long gloves. . . . They must have cost —— He tried to think what the gloves must have cost, but he had nothing to go by. Rosalind had never worn such gloves, nor his mother or sisters. Only

women who were very rich wore gloves like that — or women ——

He faced the thought at last. He had come out where the salt air struck him; the town and its lights had fallen behind; there was the marsh to cross, and he was on a long beach, the wind in his face, the water rolling up in spray and sweeping slowly back —

He strode forward, his head to the wind. . . . There was no one that she knew — no man. . . . How should she know any one that he did not know! She was never away. . . . But was he — sure! How did he know what went on — all day . . . half past seven till seven at night? In the evenings she mended the children's clothes and he looked over the paper. Sometimes they talked about things and planned

how they could get along. Rosalind was a good manager. He saw her sitting beside the lamp, in her cheap dress, her head bent over the figures, working it out with him — and he saw the woman in the alcove — the clothes she wore — he drew back before it — more than the whole family spent in a year! . . . The gloves alone might have bought her Sunday suit — Sunday was, after all, the only day he knew where she was — in church with him and, in the afternoon, lying down in her room while he took the children for a walk. . . . He was a good father — he set his teeth to it defiantly, against the wind. She could not accuse *him* of neglect. . . . Suddenly a hurt feeling stirred somewhere deep down — He did not look at it; he

did not know it was there. But the first shock had passed. He was not bewildered any more. He could think steadily, putting point to point, building up the "case". . . . Then, suddenly, he would see her in the great spectacles, reminding him of the clothes-line — and his "case" collapsed like a foolish little card house. . . . Not Rosalind — other women, perhaps — but not Rosalind. . . . He turned slowly back, the wind behind him urging him on. He would go home — to her. Perhaps when he saw her he should know what to think. . . . But perhaps she had not yet come home. If he hurried he might get there before her and face her as she came in. He hurried fast, he almost ran, and when he reached the streets he signalled

a cab; he had not used a cab for years; it would cost a dollar, at least — He looked out at the half-deserted street — the crowd had thinned. He held his watch where the light of the street arc flashed across it — six-thirty. Half an hour before his usual time. He paid the fare and went quickly up the steps. . . . The children were talking in the dining-room. There was no other sound. He opened the door and looked in. She was standing by the table looking at Tommie's coat — There was a rent in the shoulder and the face bent above it had a look of quiet patience — The grey-drab hair was parted exactly in the middle and combed smoothly down; the eyes behind the spectacles looked up — with the little line between them. When

she saw who it was she glanced for a moment at the clock and then back at him — "Did you bring the clothesline?" she asked.

He stared at her a moment — at her plain, cheap dress and homely face. Then he turned away. "I — forgot," he said.

II

WHEN supper was done and the children in bed she moved about the room for a few minutes putting things to rights. Eldridge, sitting by the table, held his newspaper in his hand and now and then he rustled it and turned it over; his eyes did not leave the little black printed marks, but his real eyes were not following the marks; they were watching the woman; they tried to dart upon her in her plainness and make her speak. There was something monstrous to him — that they should be here together, in this room — he could have touched her with his hand as she moved past

him — yet they were a thousand miles apart. He cleared his throat; he would force her, accuse her, make her reveal what was going on behind the earnest-looking glasses. . . . He turned the paper and began another page. . . . If he were another man he might spring at her — take her by the throat — force her back — back against the wall — and *make* her speak! She had finished tidying the room and came over to the table, the torn coat in her hand; she was looking down at the frayed threads in the rent, the little line between her eyes; he did not look up or move; he could hear her breathing — then she gave a little sigh and laid the coat on the table. . . . She was leaving the room. His eyes leaped after her and came back.

When she returned she spread the roll of pieces on the table and selected one, slipping it in beneath the rent; he could see — without taking his eyes from the page — he could see the anxious, faintly red knuckles and her fingers fitting the piece in place with deft, roughened tips. She had a kind of special skill at mending, making old things new. When they were first married it had been one of their little jokes — how lucky she was to have married a poor man. He had kissed her fingers one day — he recalled it — when she had shown him the little skilful darn in his coat; he had called it a kind of poem and he had kissed her. It seemed almost shameless to him, behind his paper — the foolishness was shameless—of kissing her for that. . . .

She was sewing swiftly now with the short, still movements that came and went like breaths; her head was bent over the coat and he could see the parting of her hair; he dropped his eye to it for a minute and rustled the paper and turned it vaguely. "I was in at Merwin's this afternoon," he said.

The needle paused a dart — and went on rhythmically, in and out. "Did you like it?" she asked. She had not lifted her head from her work.

He turned a casual page and read on — "Oh, so-so." It was the sort of absent-minded talk they often had — a kind of thinking out loud without interest in one another.

"It is a popular place, isn't it?"

She was smoothing the edges of the patch thoughtfully; there was a little smile on her lip.

He folded his paper. "I'm going to bed," he announced.

She glanced quickly at the clock and resumed her work. "I must finish this. He hasn't any other to wear." The needle went in and out.

Eldridge rose and stretched himself above her. He looked down at her — at the swift-moving hands and grey closeness of her dress. He would like to take her in his hands and crush out of her the thoughts — make her speak out the thoughts that followed the swift-going needle; he did not know that he wanted this — he was only feeling over and over, in some deep, angry place — "What the devil was

she doing there? What the —— " over and over.

He moved about the room a minute and went out. The woman by the table sewed on. A bolt shot in the front hall and Eldridge's feet mounted the stairs slowly. Then the room was quiet — only the clock and the needle.

Presently the needle stopped — the woman's hands lay folded in her lap. The figure was motionless, the head bent — only across her face moved the little smile. . . . The clock travelled round and whirred its warning note and struck, and she only stirred a little, as if a breath escaped her, and took up her work, looking at it blindly.

A sound came in the hall and she looked up.

He stood in the doorway, his old

dressing-gown wrapped around him, his hands gaunt, with the little hairs at the wrist uncovered by cuffs.

She looked at him, smiling absently. There was something almost beautiful in her face as she lifted it to him —

"When are you coming to bed?" he asked harshly.

"Why, right now, Eldridge — I must have been dreaming." She gathered up the work from her lap. "I hope I haven't kept you awake."

He stood looking at her a minute. Then he wheeled about without response. His feet beneath the bath gown moved awkwardly. But the spine in the bath gown had a cold, dignified, offended look — a kind of grotesque stateliness—as it disappeared through the doorway.

The woman looked after it, the little, gathering smile still on her face. Then she turned toward the lamp and put it out, and the radiant smile close to the lamp became a part of the dark.

III

BY morning it had become a dream. Eldridge was late and he hurried from the house and hurried all the morning to catch up. By luncheon time he was in another world. He took plenty of time for his luncheon; it was one of the things he had learned — to eat his luncheon slowly and take time to digest it. Sometimes he read the paper, sometimes he dropped into a moving-picture show for a few minutes afterward. But to-day he did neither. He sat in the restaurant — it was a crowded restaurant, all America coming and going — and he watched it idly. He had a rested,

comfortable feeling, as if he had escaped some calamity. It seemed foolish now, as he looked back — a kind of fever in the blood that had twisted the commonest things into queer shape. He looked back over it dispassionately — it was the woman in Merwin's who had started it, of course; there *was* something about her — something like Rosalind — curiously like her — it was like what Rosalind *might* have been, more than what she was — a kind of spirited-up Rosalind! He smiled grimly.

He called for his check; and while he waited he saw her again, the figure of the woman — not in the restaurant — but in a kind of vision — in the alcove behind the curtain, her head a little bent, her hands folded quietly

in her lap . . . who *was* she — ? His heart gave a sudden twist and stopped — He had never felt like this about — any one — had he? He looked down at a red check, with its stamped black figures, and fumbled in his pocket — and brought out a coin and laid it beside the check and stared at it. . . . The check and the coin slipped away and he stared at the marble top. Suppose he saw her — again . . . some time. . . . Two coins reappeared on the table and he picked them up. Then he put back one and felt for his hat and went out. . . . The traffic shrieked at him and people jostled him with their elbows and hurried him, and he jostled back and woke up and shook off the queerness and went about his work. . . . He was forty-one years

old and his property was all well invested. It had never occurred to him that he could be different from himself. . . . He read in the paper of people who did things — did things different from themselves, suddenly — people who squandered fortunes in a day, or murdered and ran away from business — and their wives — people who committed suicide. Vicariously, he knew all about how queer men could be . . . and his chief experience with it all, with this world that his newspaper rolled before him every day, was a kind of wonder that people would do such things and a knowledge, deeper than faith or conviction, that Eldridge Walcott would never do any of them. He explained such men — if he explained them at all — by saying

that they must have a screw loose somewhere. Perhaps he thought of men, vaguely, as put together with works inside, carefully adjusted and screwed in place, warranted, with good usage, to run so long; certainly it had not occurred to him that a man could change much after he was forty years old.

He went back to business refreshed, more refreshed than his luncheon often left him. He thought of Rosalind, now and then, with a kind of thankfulness — Rosalind waiting for him at night with the children, life moving on in the same comfortable way. He had even a moment's flash of thankfulness to the unknown woman that she had made him see how comfortable he was, how much he had to be thankful

for in his quiet life. It was a profitable afternoon — the best stroke of business in six months; and he flattered himself that he handled it well. He felt unusually alive, alert. On the way home he passed a florist's and half stopped, looking down at a beautiful plant that flamed on a bench outside the door; he did not know what it was; they were all "plants" to him, except roses — he knew a rose — this was not a rose; he looked at it a moment and hurried on. . . . She would think it strange if he brought her anything like a plant.

The idea grew with him the next day and the next. Why should he not give her something? She deserved it. There seemed always some good reason why her clothes were the last to

be bought and the plainest and shabbiest — and a woman's clothes could always be made over. . . . Suppose she had a new suit — something that was really good — Suppose he got it for her — would she be in the least like that — other — one — ? He had long ago abandoned the idea that there was a real resemblance between them. He knew now that he must have been overwrought, excited in some mysterious way — the woman herself seemed to have excited him.

The wrong that he had done Rosalind — even in his thought — made him tender of her. He did not buy a crimson flower to take home to her. But a week later he called one day at his bank and in the evening he handed her a little, twisted roll of something.

She had finished her work and was sitting for a minute before she brought her sewing basket. He laid the roll in the curve of her fingers in her lap.

When she glanced down at it she took it up in short-sighted surprise and looked at the new, crisp bills — and then at him —

He nodded. "For you," he said. "It 's a new suit — you need it." He balanced a little on his toes, looking down at her.

Her face flushed red; it grew from neck to chin and flooded up to him. "What do you mean?" she said under her breath.

"I want you to get a good one — good stuff, good dressmaker — It 's enough, isn't it?"

"It is more — than enough —" The

red had flooded her face again — as if she would cry. But she said nothing for a minute. She was looking down at the bills.

Then she looked up. The plain face had a smile like light from somewhere far away. "May I get just what I like — ?"

He nodded proudly. She was almost beautiful . . . perhaps — in the new gown — He pulled himself together. . . . She had looked down again and was fingering the bills happily. . . . "There is a little muff and fur —" she said.

He nodded, encouraging —

"A muff and fur and a little fur cap that I wanted — so much — for Mary — and overcoats for the boys — they're so shabby — and your hat is really not

fit, you know —" She was looking up now and smiling and checking them off —

He stopped her with a gesture. "You are to spend it on yourself," he said almost harshly.

"On myself — ! Why do you say that?" She almost confronted him — as if she caught her breath —

"You never have things and you always get out of spending things on yourself." He half muttered the words.

"Oh — oh — ! I shall get something for myself. You will see!"

He held out his hand. He was a good man of business. No one got far ahead of him.—"When you have bought the dress I will pay for it," he said. "Give them to me. I cannot trust you with them."

She looked at him — and at the bills — and they dropped from her hand into his slowly and her arms fell; her shoulders rose and trembled and the hands covered her face. She was weeping, deep, silent sobs —

He bent over her — ashamed. "You must not do that," he said. "You needn't feel bad. I wanted you to have it —"

She took down her hands and looked at him. "It seemed so good to have — enough — more than enough! to be extravagant!" She threw out her hands with a little wasteful gesture.

He was looking at her closely. A suspicion leaped at him. Her face was so free and the tears had made it mysterious and sweet — she was as wonderful as that other — she was —

She was — He stopped with a quick jerk. "I want you to be extravagant on *yourself!*" he said. He was watching her face.

It flamed again but it did not drop before him. Only the eyes sent back a look — on guard, it seemed to him. "I do not need so much for myself," she said quietly, "part of it will be quite enough."

He put the bills in his pocket. "All or nothing," he said easily.

All the next day he turned it in his mind — the look in her eyes, the beauty — something deep within her, shining out. . . . He no longer went peacefully about his work. *Could* it have been Rosalind, after all? . . . He had never seen her look like that — he had

She was weeping, deep silent sobs

not dreamed. . . . But when he came home at night the look was not there; he fancied that she was more worn and a little troubled. Certainly, no one could think of her as beautiful . . . and why should a man want to think his wife beautiful? . . . It was the woman in the alcove that had done the mischief. He should never get over the woman in the alcove. She had got into his life whether or not. He could not be comfortable about Rosalind. There was something about her that he had not known or suspected before. He fell to watching her when she was not aware. He had thought he knew her so well and now she was a stranger. . . . But perhaps it was himself — the woman had done something to him. Rosa-

lind was the same — but was she? He looked at her a long time one night as she lay asleep. The moonlight had come in and was on her face. He watched it — as if a breath might speak to him — it was not Rosalind's face. Some stranger was there, out of a strange land; a great yearning came to him to waken her, to ask her whence she came, what it was that she knew — what made her face so peaceful in the moonlight — calling to him? He got up softly and closed the blind. He remembered he had heard that it was not good for people to sleep with the moon shining on them — it was only superstition, of course. But superstition had suddenly changed its bounds for him. . . . Were there things, perhaps, that people knew,

that they guessed — true things that they could not explain and did not talk about? . . .

IV

HE could not bring himself to speak to Rosalind about the woman in the alcove. He wanted to speak — to do away, once for all, with the strangeness and the spell she seemed to have cast about him, to speak of her casually as that woman I saw the other day at Merwin's; but he could not do it. It was as if he were afraid — or bashful. He had not felt like this since — not since he was in love — with Rosalind! He looked at the thought and turned it over slowly. He was not in love with the woman — certainly he was not in love with her! He would not know her again if he

met her on the street. . . . Would he not! Suddenly he felt that he had known her always — longer than he had known Rosalind — longer than he had been alive! He found himself wondering about the world — how it was the world got into existence — what were men doing in it — and women — and his mind travelled out into space — great stars swung away mistily — what did it mean — all his world and stars? . . . Perhaps if he saw her again, just a few minutes, he would feel like himself again. . . . It was worth trying — and how he wanted — to — see her! Well, what of that? There was nothing wrong in being curious about a woman like that. If she *had* some uncanny power over him he might as well find it out — fight it!

He was respectable — he was a married man. . . . And what had Rosalind to do with it? Perhaps it *was* Rosalind. He should never quiet down till he knew. There was something in his blood. The next time he was passing Merwin's he would go in. . . .

He passed Merwin's that afternoon — and went in. But she was not there. He sat a little while in the quiet of the place, looking across to the alcove where the woman had been. There was no one in it and the curtains were drawn back. Each time a stir came from the swinging doors or a dress rustled beside him he half turned and held his breath till it passed and took its place at one of the little tables or in an alcove. But the third alcove on the right remained empty. No quiet

figure moved with soft grace and seated itself there . . . no one but Eldridge saw the figure — the gentle, bending line of the neck, the little droop of the face. . . . If only she would lift it or turn to him a minute. . . . And then the still, clear emptiness of the place swept between; the green curtains framed it, as if it were a picture, a little antechamber leading somewhere. . . .

Eldridge shook himself and took his hat and went out. The doors swung silently behind him — he would never go in there again! He was a fool — a soft fool! Then he almost stopped in the crowd of the street. . . . And he knew suddenly that he would go back. He would go — again and again — he could not help himself. But he

was *not* in love — he had been in love — with Rosalind — and it was not like this. . . . A policeman thrust out an arm and stopped him, and he waited for the traffic to stream past. . . . He was not in love — only curious about the woman; it teased him not to know who she was . . . and why he had been so sure that she was Rosalind. If he could see her again — just a minute — long enough to make sure, he would not care if he never saw her again. He was loyal, of course, to Rosalind, more loyal than he had ever been. It seemed curious how the woman had made him see Rosalind — all the plainness of her filled with something strange and sweet — like moonlight or a quiet place.

V

THE next day he went again to Merwin's. No use for him to say he would keep away. He knew, all through the drudging accounts in the morning, that he would go; and while he talked with clients and arranged sales and managed a real-estate deal — back in the corner of his mind, behind its green curtains, the little alcove waited.

He passed through the swinging doors and glanced quickly, and the hand holding his hat gripped it tight. The curtains of the third alcove to the right were half closed, but along the floor lay a fold of grey dress and over

the end of the seat, thrown carelessly back, hung the edge of a fur-lined wrap.

Eldridge turned blindly toward his place. Some one was there. He had to take the alcove behind, and he could not see her from the alcove behind — not even if she should push back the curtain that shut her away — But he found himself, strangely, not caring to see her. . . . She was there, a little way off; it was she — no need to part the curtains and look in on her. He felt her presence through all the place. He was no longer guilty. . . . He was hardly curious to know her. He took up the card from the table before him and studied it blindly. . . . His heart seemed to lie out before him — a clear, white place. . . . Men and women were not so evil as he

had dreamed. He was doing something that a week ago he would have condemned any one for; yet his heart, as he looked into it, was singularly clear and big — and the light shining in it puzzled him — like a charm — It was a place that he had never seen; he had dreamed of it, perhaps, as a child. He ordered something, at random, from the card and moved nearer the aisle. . . . No, he could not see her — only the fold of her dress and the bit of grey fur. He was glad she was warmly dressed. The weather was keener to-day. He must get Rosalind a wrap — something warm like that and lined with fur — soft and grey and deep. Everything the woman had he would like Rosalind to have — perhaps it might atone — a

little — for the light in his heart. He had not felt like this for Rosalind. . . . But how should they have known. They were only a boy and girl — and some moonlight. . . . And all the time this other woman was waiting — somewhere. . . . No one had told him. If some one had said to him: "Wait, she is coming — you must wait!" But no one knew, no one had told him. . . . Did *she* know, across there in her place, did she know — had *she* waited — for him? He stirred a little. Some one might be with her now; or she might be waiting for some one. But he could not go to her. . . . And yet — why not — ? — He had only to cross the aisle — and put back the curtains — and look at her. . . . He shook himself and lifted his glass

and drank grimly. He was a lawyer; his name was Eldridge Walcott; he lived in a brick house and he had children — three children — *That* was the real world; this other thing was — madness. . . . So this was the way men felt! This was it, was it — very clean and whole — as if life were beginning for them — they had made mistakes, but they would try again; they saw something bigger and better than they had ever known — and they reached out to it. Men were not wicked, as he had thought — It was a strange world where you had to be wicked to do things — like this! . . . And there might be some one with her now! Under the voices and the music he fancied he could hear them talking in low tones; their voices seemed to

come and go vaguely; half guessed, not constant, but quiet and happy. . . . Or was it his own heart that beat to her — the words it could speak? . . . He would not speak to her — but he would not go away. . . . He would wait till she moved back the curtain and stepped out.

Then he half remembered something — and looked at his watch — he had promised Rosalind to wait for the boys and take them to the dentist's. She had said she could not go this afternoon and he had promised to wait at the office; he had not meant to come here. . . . He slipped back the watch and stood up and hesitated — and turned away. He might never see her now. Well, he had promised Rosalind. Somehow, the promise to Rosa-

lind must be kept — now. The letter of the law must be kept!

They were waiting for him in the hall by his office door, sitting at the top of the flight of stairs and peering down into the elevator-shaft as the elevator shot up and down. He saw them as he stepped out, and smiled at them. They were fresh, wholesome boys, and he had a sense, as he fitted the key in the lock and they stood waiting behind his bent back, that they belonged to him. He had always thought of them as Rosalind's boys!

He threw open the door and they went in, looking about them almost shyly; they were not shy boys, but father was a big man — and they looked

at the place where he worked. . . . Some time they would be — men and have an office. . . .

Eldridge Walcott turned back from the desk that he had opened. He had taken out a little roll of paper and slipped it into his pocket. Their eyes followed him gravely. He looked at them standing — half in their world, half in his — and smiled to them.

"You had to wait a good while, didn't you?" he said.

They nodded together. "Most an hour," said Tommie.

"Well, that's all right — Something kept me. Come on."

When they reached home that evening he handed the little roll of paper he had taken from the desk to Rosalind. "I have doubled it," he said.

"There will be enough for everything you want."

For a minute she did not speak. Then she took it. "Thank you," she said slowly.

"I want you to get a suit, you know — a good one —" He paused. "— And you need something warm — a fur-lined wrap or something — don't you?"

She wrinkled the little line between her eyes. "It is — so late — the winter is half gone already." Then her face cleared. "I think I'll — wait till spring," she said.

He could almost fancy something danced at him, mocked him behind the still face.

He turned away, the deep, hurt feeling coming close. "Get what you

like," he said. "I want you to have enough."

The money lay in her hand, and her fingers opened on it and closed on it. Then she breathed softly, like a sigh, and went to her desk and put it away.

VI

THROUGH the weeks that followed Eldridge watched the things money could buy quietly taking their place in the house. Little comforts that he had not missed — had not known any one could miss — were at hand. The children looked somehow subtly different. He had a sense of expansion, softly breaking threads of habit, expectancy. Only Rosalind seemed unchanged. Yet each time he looked at her he fancied that she *had* changed — more than all of them. He could not keep his eyes from her. Something was hidden in her — Something he did not know — that he

would never know. Perhaps he should die and not know it. . . . Did the dead know things — everything? He seemed to remember hazily from Sunday-school — something — If he were dead, he might come close to her — as close as the little thoughts behind her eyes——

The cold grew keener, and Eldridge, shivering home from the office, remembered a pair of fur gloves in the attic. He had not worn them for years. But after supper he took a light and went to look for them.

It was cold there, in the attic, and he shivered a little, looking about the dusty place. There were boxes stacked along under the eaves and garments hanging grotesquely from the beams. He knew where Rosalind kept the

gloves; he had seen them one day last summer when he was looking for window netting. It had not seemed to him then, in the hot attic, that any one could ever need gloves. He set down the lamp on a box and drew out a trunk and looked in it; they were not there. She must have changed the place of things — he would have to go down and ask her.

Then his eye sought out a box pushed far back under the eaves — he did not remember that he had ever seen that box; he glanced at it — and half turned away to pick up the lamp — and turned back. He could not have told why he felt that he must open it. He had set the light on a box a little above him, and it glimmered down on the box that he drew out and opened —

and on a smooth piece of tissue-paper under the cover—— A faint perfume came from beneath the paper, and he lifted it. There was a pair of long grey gloves — with the shape of a woman's hand still softly held in the finger-tips. . . . He lifted them and stared and moistened his lips and ran his hand down inside the box to the bottom — soft, filmy stuff that yielded and sprang back. . . . He kneeled before it, half on his heels, peering down. He bent forward and lifted the things out — white things with threaded ribbon and lace — things such as Eldridge Walcott had never seen — delicate, web-like things — then a fur-lined coat and a grey dress and, at the bottom, a little linked something. He lifted it and peered at it and at the

coins shining through the meshes and dropped it back.

He stood up and looked about him vaguely . . . after a minute he shivered a little. It was very cold in the attic. He knelt down and tried to put the things back; but his fingers shook, and the things took queer shapes and fell apart, and a soft perfume came from them that confused him. He tried to steady himself — he began at the bottom, putting each thing carefully in place . . . smoothing it down.

The door below creaked. A voice listened. . . . "You up there, Eldridge?"

He straightened himself . . . out of a thousand thoughts and questions. "Where are my fur gloves?" he said

quietly. He took the light from its box and came over to the stairs.

Her face, lifted to him, was in the light and he could see the rays of light falling on it — and on the stillness, like a pool. . . .

"They're in the black trunk," said Rosalind. Her foot moved to the stair — "I'll get them for you."

"No — Don't come up," he said. "It's cold here. I know — I was just looking there."

So she went back, closing the door behind her to keep out the cold.

When Eldridge came down he did not look at her. He blew out the light and put the gloves with his hat in the hall and came over with his paper and sat down.

She was standing by the fire, bend-

ing over a pair of socks that she had been washing out. She was hanging them in front of the fire, pulling out the toes. Her eyes looked at him inquiringly as her fingers went on stretching the little toes.

"Did you find them?"

"Yes." He opened his paper slowly.

She went on fussing at the socks, a little, absent smile on her face. "If it keeps on like this I must get heavier flannels for them," she said. The look in her face was very sweet as she bent over the small socks.

He looked up — and glanced away. "Money enough — have you?"

"Oh, yes — plenty of money. I will get them to-morrow — if I can go in to town —" she said.

His mind flashed to the attic above

them and to the quiet alcove with the little green curtains that shut it off. "Better dress warm if you do go," he said carelessly. "It is pretty cold, you know." He took up the paper and stared at it.

VII

SO it was — Rosalind! He sat in his office and stared at the blotter on his desk. . . . It was a green blotter —— For years after Eldridge Walcott could not see a green blotter without a little, sudden sense of upheaval; he would walk into a plain commercial office — suddenly the walls hovered, the furniture moved subtly — even the floor grew a little unsteady before he could come with a jerk to a green blotter on the roller-top desk — and face it squarely. The blotter on his own desk was exchanged for a crimson one — the next day. He would have liked to change everything in the

room. The very furniture seemed to mock him — to question. . . .

So it was — Rosalind! Rosalind — was like that —! His heart gave a quick beat — like a boy's — and stood still. . . . Rosalind was like that — for — somebody else. . . . He stared at the blotter and drew a pad absently toward him.

The office boy stuck his head in the door and drew it back. He shook it at a short, heavy man with a thinnish, black-grey beard who was hovering near. "He told me not to disturb him — not for anybody," the boy said importantly.

The man took a card from his pocket and wrote on it. "Take him that."

The boy glanced at the name and at the thin, blackish beard. There was

a large wart on the man's chin where the beard did not grow. The boy's eyes rested on it — and looked away to the card. "I'll — ask him —" he said.

The man nodded. "Take him that first."

The boy went in.

The man walked to the window and looked down; the thick flesh at the back of his neck overlapped a little on the collar of his well-cut coat and the heavy shoulders seemed to shrug themselves under the smooth fit.

The boy's eyes surveyed the back respectfully. "You're to come in," he says.

The man turned and went in and Eldridge Walcott looked up. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting."

"That's all right." The man sat down a little heavily — as if he were tired. "That's all right. I waited because I wanted to see you. I want some one to do — a piece of work — for me —"

"Yes?"

"I don't care to have my regular man on it —"

"You have Clarkson, don't you?"

"Yes—I have Clarkson." The man waited. "Clarkson's all right — for business," he said. "I want a different sort — for this."

He felt in the pocket of his coat and drew out a letter, and then another, and held them, looking down at them absently, turning them over in his hand.

"It's a divorce—" he said. He

went on turning the letters in his hand but not looking at them. "I 've waited as long as I could," he added after a minute. "It 's no use —" He laid the letters on the desk. "It took a detective — and money — to get 'em. I reckon they 'll do the business," he said.

Eldridge reached out his hand for them. The man's errand startled him a little. He had been going over divorce on the green blotter when the boy came in. He opened the letters slowly. A little faint perfume drifted up — and between him and the words came a sense of the blackish-grey beard and the wart in among it. He had stared at it, fascinated, while the man talked. . . . He could imagine what it might mean to a woman, day after

day. He focussed his attention on the letter — and read it and took up the other and laid it down. . . .

"Yes — Those are sufficient," he said almost curtly. He took up his pen. "Your middle initial is J?"

"Gordon J.," said the man.

Eldridge traced the name. "And your wife?"

The man stared at him.

"Her full name —" said Eldridge.

"Her name is Cordelia Rose — Barstow," said the man.

Eldridge wrote it efficiently. "Do you name any one as co-respondent?"

"I name — his name is —" The man gulped and his puffy face was grim. "John E. Tower is his name," he said slowly.

Eldridge filled in the paper before

him and laid a blotter across it. "That is sufficient. I will file the application to-morrow. There will be no trouble. She will not contest it — ?"

The man swallowed a little. "No — She wants — to be free —" He ended the words defiantly, but with a kind of shame.

Eldridge made no reply. He was seeing a quiet figure, with bent head, smiling at something — something that shut him out. He looked across to the man.

The man's eyes met his. "That 's all you need — is it?" He seemed a little disappointed. "No more to it than this?"

"That 's all," said Eldridge.

But the man did not get up. "I don't know how it happened," he

said. "You see, I never guessed — not till two weeks — ten days ago or so."

"I see —"

"I 'd always trusted Cordelia — I hadn't ever thought as she could do anything like that — not *my* wife!"

"One doesn't usually expect it of one's — own wife." Eldridge laughed a little, but it was not unkindly, and the man seemed to draw toward him.

"I 've never mentioned it — except to that detective, and I didn't tell him — any more than I had to — He didn't seem to need much telling —" he said dryly. "He seemed to sense just about what had been going on — without telling."

"Yes — ?" Eldridge was looking

thoughtfully into the greyish-black beard with the round lump in it.

"He 's got the facts. It took him just two weeks — to get 'em." His hand motioned toward the letters, but there was something in the face — a kind of puffy appeal.

Eldridge nodded. "They know what to do," he said quietly.

"I hadn't even mistrusted," said the man. His eyes were looking at something that Eldridge could not see — something that seemed to come from a faint perfume in the room. . . . "I can see it plain enough now — looking back. . . . You don't mind my telling you — a little — about it."

Eldridge shook his head. The man seemed a kind of lumbering boy, yet he was a shrewd, keen man in business.

"It might help — you know —" he said. "I thought you'd ask me, probably — I'd kind of planned to tell you, I guess." He laughed a little awkwardly.

"Go ahead," said Eldridge.

"He was *my* friend, you see. And I brought him home with me and made 'em friends. . . . I can see now, looking back, what a fool I was — about it. But I didn't see it — then. I don't know now what it was about him. . . . He's old as I be — and I've got the money. I can give her everything she wants — more than he can. But I know now that from the first day she see him she was curious about him. . . . I'd brought him home to dinner one night — It was just after we were married. . . . I always kind

of think of him that night — the way he looked at table — he's tall — You know him —?"

Eldridge nodded. He was seeing the tall, distinguished figure — and beside it a humped-up one across his desk.

"We had red lamp-shades and candles and flowers — Everything shining, you know — Cordelia likes 'em that way. . . . When I try to think how it started I see 'em the way they looked that first night. I was proud of 'em both. I felt as if Cordelia belonged to me — and as if he did, too — in a way — " He looked at Eldridge. "I'd put him on to a good thing in business —!"

"Yes."

"He and Cordelia laughed and talked

the whole evening — kind o' took it up — back and forth — the way you 'd play ball. I could see Cordelia liked him. I was a fool. I 'd waited about getting married till I had money enough to give a woman — to give her everything — and when she 'd got it I never see there might be — something else she 'd want. . . . I don't just know what now —" He shook his head. "Some days, since I 've got sure of it, I 've felt as if it *couldn't* be so — as if she couldn't have gone on living with me and having that other life — I didn't know about — shut away from me — and I loving her. . . ." The little, clear alcove moved before Eldridge and moved away. He was making absent marks on the edge of the pad before him.

The man sighed. "Well — It isn't any use! That 's all, I guess —"

Eldridge looked up. "Had you thought of — winning her back?"

The man shook his head. "I couldn't do it." He looked at him as if wondering whether he would understand. "There 's something about her I don't get at," he said slowly.

"Isn't there something about any woman you don't get at?" said Eldridge.

"That 's it!" assented the man. "It isn't just Cordelia. It 's all of them — in back of 'em, somehow. I can't tell you just how it is, but I 've thought of it a lot — I guess there isn't anything I haven't thought of — since I knew — lying awake nights and thinking. Somehow, I knew, the first day it came

to me — I knew there wasn't any use . . . since the day I come on 'em at Merwin's."

The lawyer's hand, making its little marks, stopped — and went on. "They were at Merwin's — together?" he said.

"Everybody goes to Merwin's," said the man. "It wasn't their being there; it was the way they looked when I saw 'em. . . . They were sitting in one of them little alcove places, you know —"

Eldridge nodded. Yes — he knew.

"The curtains were open — wide open," said the man. "Anybody could 'a' looked in. There wasn't anything wrong about it. But I saw their faces — both of 'em — and I knew. . . . They were just sitting quiet — the way people do when they're alone. . . . There's something different about the

way people sit — when they 're alone — by themselves — I don't know as you 've ever noticed it?"

"I have noticed it," said Eldridge.

"Quiet and happy —" said the man, "and not talking — and not needing to talk." He took up his hat. "Well — you know where to find me. I shan't bother you like this again——" He stood up.

Eldridge held out a hand. "I am glad you told me. It helps — to understand — the case."

The man's thick face looked at him. "*I* don't understand it myself," he said, "but I 've got to go through with it."

VIII

ELDRIDGE went on making little marks on the edge of the paper. He no longer stared at the blotter; he was seeing things. Gordon Barstow's recital had shown things to him in perspective and his own trouble seemed moved far away from him to a kind of clear place. He sat and looked at it — making little marks on the paper. Rosalind was not to blame. A woman like Rosalind had the right — she could do what she wanted! What had *he* ever done to win her — to keep her? Not even money. He had kept it for himself — and built up a comfortable fortune. . . . He had the fortune —

yes. And he had lost Rosalind. . . . He suddenly saw himself in the clear light — he was not lovable like old Barstow. The vision grew before him — all his saving closeness, his dulness — a lifeless prig! . . . And then the picture of Rosalind, the vision of her in her alcove — "the way people sit when they are alone — I don't know as you ever noticed — ?" old Barstow had said.

Well, then — what was to be done? His shoulders squared a little. No man was going to win Rosalind — without a fight! The man who would win her should reckon with him. . . . He had never known Rosalind. Perhaps Rosalind had never known him. . . . What had he given her — to know him by? She had had the right to work

for him, to sweep his floors and make his bed and take care of the children. . . . She should have money now. She should become a partner — in all his plans — and suddenly Eldridge Walcott saw that money would not win her — money would not buy the gracious presence in the alcove; she did not need money. . . . He must give his soul — to win her —

Then he took out his soul and looked at it — the shrunken, dry, rattling thing — and flicked it from him with a finger-nail.

The office boy put his head in cautiously.

"What do you want?" said Eldridge harshly.

"It 's Mr. Dutton," said the boy.

"Well, show him in."

And while Mr. Dutton talked of real estate, Eldridge's soul peeped out at the man. He wanted to stop the flow of facts and figures and put a straight question to him. "How do you get on with your wife, Mr. Dutton?" he wanted to say to him. He could see the man's startled face checked in its flow of fact. . . . It would not do; of course it would not do to ask him how he got on with his wife. Probably he got on with her as Eldridge Walcott had done — sewing, sweeping, eating, saving —

"So I have decided," the man was saying, "to take the entire block — if the title is good."

Eldridge Walcott bowed him out and turned back from the door. But he did not sit down. He would go to

Merwin's. Perhaps she was there — she had said she might come in to town. . . . But, with his hand on the door, he paused—— Suppose he found her — What then? — and the man with her? What then? — Suppose he found her! There was nothing he could do — not yet! He would win her back. . . . But the man he had to reckon with was not the man sitting with her now, perhaps, in the alcove. The man he had to reckon with was Eldridge Walcott — the little, shrunken, undersized Eldridge Walcott.

He saw it — standing with his hand on the door, looking down — and he looked at it a long minute.

Then he opened the door.

The office boy wheeled about from

the window-shade that was stuck halfway up.

"I am ready to see anybody that comes, Burton," he said.

"All right," said the boy. "This old thing gets stuck every other day!" He jerked at it.

Eldridge came across and looked at the cord and straightened it and went back to his room. The little incident strengthened him subtly. He had never yet failed in anything he undertook, big or little — he had always succeeded in what he undertook — And suddenly he saw that Eldridge Walcott had never in his life undertaken anything that was not small. . . . He had done small, safe things. He had straightened window-shades all his life — and he had never failed!

He had always had a half-veiled contempt for men who ran risks. Find a safe thing and hold on to it had been his policy. It had brought him through smugly. He had never made a mistake. . . . The nearest he had ever come to a risk was before he asked Rosalind to marry him. There had been something about her that he could not fathom, something that drew him — and made him afraid — a kind of sweet mystery . . . that would not let him be safe. Then it had seemed so safe afterward; they had lived together quietly without a break. The young Rosalind who had taught him to be afraid he had forgotten — and now young Rosalind had come back . . . she had come back to him and with deeper mystery. . . . This was

the real Rosalind, the other was only a shadowy promise. . . . The young Rosalind would try him for his soul — and he had — no soul!

Who was that other man in the alcove with her — the man who had won her? Who was it she had found to understand the mystery — to look up to her and worship her — as he had worshipped Rosalind, the girl; as he had worshipped Rosalind — and let her go!

And he had been thinking about divorce! Thinking of the grounds for it and how he should get grounds of divorce — as Gordon Barstow had done. He glanced at the two letters on his desk and at the little, jotted notes of the Barstow case and a smile flitted to them — grounds for divorce from Ros-

alind! He saw her, in her freedom, moving from him. . . . His teeth set a little. She should never leave him! She should stay with him. She should stay because he wanted her — and because she wanted him!

And through the rest of the day, as clients came and went, he saw something new. He saw cases differently. Men were accustomed to come to him because he was a "safe" man. . . . Well, he was not quite safe to-day — But he knew underneath, as he worked, that his advice had never been so worth while.

IX

HE had left the office early and had caught a car that was passing the corner as he came out. As soon as he entered he knew that Rosalind was in the car, three seats ahead. He gave a little start, a quick flash — he did not want to catch Rosalind off guard — Then he smiled; it was not Rosalind of the alcove — it was the plain, every-day Rosalind, her lap heaped with bundles, and bundles on the seat beside her. Rosalind's flannels, he thought, probably.

He moved down the aisle and stood beside the seat, lifting his hat and looking down at her.

"Why, Eldridge!" She looked up with the little peering smile and made a place for him among the bundles, trying to gather them up into her lap.

But he swept them away. "I'll take these," he said.

The little distressed look came between her eyes. Eldridge couldn't bear bundles. "I thought I wouldn't wait to have them sent," she apologized. "It's so cold — and they need them — right off."

"Yes — " He looked at her jacket; it was thin, with the shabby lining showing at the edge. "Did you get yourself a warm wrap?" he asked.

She was looking out of the window, and the line of her cheek flushed swiftly. "No — I — "

"I want you to do it — at once."

She glanced at him — a little questioning look in her face. "I — have — seen something I like —" she said.

"Get it to-morrow. I will order it for you when I go in."

Her hands made a gesture above the bundles. "Please don't, Eldridge. I would rather — do it — myself."

"Very well. But remember to get it."

"Yes — I will get it." She sighed softly.

Deceitful Rosalind! If he had not seen for himself the box in the attic with its overflowing soft colors and the grey fur, he would not have believed the deceit of her face. . . .

Not that he was blaming anybody. He was not blaming Rosalind. The picture of Mr. Eldridge Walcott remained with him. . . . He was not

likely to forget how Mr. Eldridge Walcott had looked to him — in the flash of light.

Perhaps he looked like that to Rosalind — to both Rosalinds! He turned a little in the seat and glanced down at her — Yes, they were both there — the plain little figure in its shabby jacket and the reticent, beautiful woman of the alcove.

The fingers in cheap gloves were fussing at a parcel. "I got fleece-lined shirts for Tommie — his skin is so sensitive — I thought I would try fleece-lined ones for him."

Damn fleece-lined ones! Would she never talk to him except of undershirts — and coal-hods? He took the paper from his pocket and glanced casually at it.

"Has coal gone up?" she asked. "They said it would go up — if it stayed cold." The anxious lines were in her face.

He put down the paper and leaned toward her. He felt nearer to her, in a street car, than in his own home. "Don't you worry about coal, Rosalind! We shall not freeze — nor starve."

She stared a little. "Of course, we shall not freeze, Eldridge!"

"I mean there is plenty — to be comfortable with. You are not to worry and pinch."

A quick look flooded out at him — a look of the Rosalind within. "You mean we can *afford* not to worry?"

He saw the prig Eldridge Walcott, walking in serene knowledge of a com-

fortable income while the little lines had gathered in her face. He longed to kick the respectable Mr. Eldridge Walcott from behind.

"There is quite enough money," he said. "I am doing better than I have — and I shall do better yet."

She looked down at the bundles. "I might have got a better quality," she said.

"Take them all back," said Eldridge. "I 'll take them —"

But she shook her head. "No, they need them to-morrow — and these will do —" She smiled at them. "It 's really more the feeling that you *can* get better ones, isn't it? You don't mind wearing old things — if you know you could have better ones — if you wanted to —" She broke off vaguely.

He saw the box in the attic — all the filmy softness — and he saw the ill-fitting, cheap gloves resting in her lap —

That was what had saved her — the real Rosalind. Some one had seen that her soul should be in its own clothes, now and then, and happy and free. You could not quite be jealous of a man who had done that for you — who had clothed Rosalind's soul, could you?

He could not think of the man who had clothed Rosalind's soul — who had kept alive something that was precious. He could not hate the man. But there was no place in his thoughts for him.

Suppose, after all, Rosalind belonged to the man who saw her soul

and clothed it? Suppose Rosalind belonged to him! . . . Very well — *he should not have her!*

He helped her from the car with her bundles, and as he fitted the key in the door the wind struck them fiercely; they were almost blown in with the force of it as the door opened. They stood in the hall, laughing, safe — the wind shut out —— There was a quick color in her face, and it lifted to him, laughing freshly, like a girl's.

They were together. She had not looked at him like that for years.

He pondered on the look as she went about getting supper. He watched her come and go and wondered awkwardly whether he might not offer to go out and help. He went at last into the kitchen; she was putting coal on the

fire and he took the hod from her, throwing on the coal.

She looked at him, puzzled. "Are you in a hurry for supper, Eldridge?"

"Oh — No." He went back to the living-room, and talked a little with the children, amusing them quietly. He had a home sense, a feeling that the room was a kind of presence; the wind howling outside could not touch them.

And when Rosalind came in and they sat at the table and he looked across to her shyly, almost like a boy, he wished he knew what would please her best. He could not keep his eyes off her hand as it grasped the handle of the teapot and poured his tea. It seemed such a mysterious hand with the roughened finger pricks — and the

little gentle hand inside that did no work. He wanted to take the hand, to touch it. . . . Of course, a man would not take his wife's hand — like that. He could see the startled look in Rosalind's eyes if he should reach out. . . . There was a long road to travel — and he did not know the way.

But he could begin softly with clothes — and touch her hand later perhaps. She should have beautiful things —— He had told her to buy the fur-lined coat.

He pictured her in it — the coat that *his* money should buy — he saw her wrapped in it, and he sat still thinking of her and of the coat his money should buy. Then the door opened and he looked up.

She was standing in the door — and

about her was a long grey coat lined with fur — the coat of the alcove. Her eyes looked at him over the soft fur of the collar.

He sprang to his feet — then he checked the word on his lip.

He must not let her speak. It was the coat of the alcove. She would wear it silently. But she would not tell him. She must not be frightened into saying something that was not true. He came over to her and touched the edge of the fur, as if questioning it, and she smiled and opened it out. "Is it warm enough?" she asked proudly.

She stood with the garment extended like wings, and he held his breath.

Then she drew it together softly.

"I have had it some time," she said. "I was keeping it to surprise you!"

His breath came quick. How much would she tell him? He looked at it critically. "Was it a bargain?" he asked.

"No — Not a bargain." And she stroked the edge of the fur. "I saw it and liked it — and I got it."

"That 's right. That 's the way to buy all your clothes." He looked at it a minute lightly and turned away.

She could not have guessed from his gesture that he was disappointed, but her eyes followed him. "I hope you won't think I paid too much — for it?"

"What did you pay?" he asked. His back was toward her.

"I paid — two hundred dollars," she

said. The words came lightly, and there was a little pause.

"No, I don't think that was too much." He had turned and was looking at her — straight. "I would have paid more than two hundred — to give it to you," he said slowly.

She made no reply, but her eyes regarded him gravely over the edge of the collar. Wrapped in the coat, she seemed for a moment the woman of the alcove.

He looked at her blindly.

She returned the look a minute — and turned away slowly and went out.

Eldridge walked to the table and stood looking down. . . . He had given her, in all, not more than two hundred and fifty dollars. Did she expect him — to believe — that all the

things that had come into the house since had not cost more than fifty dollars?

It was as if she flaunted it at him — as if she wanted him to know that it could not have been *his* money that bought it! . . . So that was it! She had seen — she had guessed the change in him — and this was her guard? She would force him to know — to accuse her.

Old Barstow's words came to him mockingly: "No — she will not contest it. She wants — to be — free."

X

BUT if she wished him to know she gave no other sign.

She spent the money that he gave her, and when it was gone she asked him for more.

Only once she had said as she took it: "You are sure it is right for me to spend this?"

And he had replied: "When you ask for anything I cannot give you I will let you know."

She had said nothing. She had not even glanced at him. But somehow he fancied that she understood him.

He grew to know, by intuition, the days when she would go to Merwin's.

As he left the house he would say: "She will be there —" And when he dropped in, in the afternoon, he did not even need to glance at the alcove on the right. He would sit down quietly in his place across the aisle, glad to be with her.

He never saw her come and go and he did not know whether any one was with her — behind her curtain. He tried not to know. . . . He was trying to understand Rosalind. What was it drew her? Was it music — or the quiet place? Or was there —— ?

He could easily have known. . . . Gordon Barstow's detective would have made sure for him in a day. . . . But Eldridge did not want to know — anything that a detective could tell him. He did not want to be told by detec-

tives or told things detectives could tell. He was studying Rosalind's every wish — as if he were a boy.

He did not go to Merwin's till he felt sure that she would be there in the alcove, and he left before she drew the little curtain and came out. He did not want to know. . . . He only wanted her to be there — and to sit with her a little while, quietly. . . .

He would wait and understand.

A piano had come into the house and the boys were taking lessons. One day he discovered that Rosalind was learning, too.

He had come home early, wondering whether he would ask her to go for a walk with him. He had asked her once or twice and they had gone for a

little while before supper, walking aimlessly through the suburban streets, saying very little; he had fancied that Rosalind liked it — but he could not be sure.

He opened the door with his latch-key and stepped in. Some one was playing softly, stopping to sing a little, and then playing again. . . . Rosalind was alone.

He stood very quiet in the dark hall; only a little light from above the door — shining on the stair rail and on a lamp that hung above it. . . . She was playing with the lightest touch — a few notes, as if feeling her way, and then the little singing voice answering it. . . . So she was like this — very still and happy — and he was shut out. His hand groped behind him for

So she was like this—very still and happy—and he was shut out

the latch and found it and opened the door, and he stepped outside and closed the door softly.

He stood a moment in the wind. Behind his door he heard the music playing to itself. . . .

He walked for a long time that afternoon — along the dull streets, staring at brick houses and at children running past him on brick walks. . . . It was all brick walks and long rows of houses — and dulness; he could not reach Rosalind. He could buy clothes for her — more bricks . . . and there was the music — his mind halted — and went on.

Music made her happy — like that! He bought an evening paper and studied it awhile, standing by the newsstand, with the cars and taxis shooting

past. Presently he folded the paper and took a car that was going toward town. There was something he could do for Rosalind — something that no one had thought of — something that she would like!

He was as eager and as ignorant as a boy, standing in front of the barred ticket window and looking in.

"Tickets for the Symphony?" The man glanced out at him. "House sold out."

Eldridge stared back. "You mean — I cannot — get them!"

"Something may come in. You can leave your name." The man pushed paper and pencil toward him.

Eldridge wrote his name slowly. "I want — good ones."

"Can't say —" said the man.

"There are six ahead of you —" He took up the paper and made a note.

Eldridge stepped outside. A man looked at him and moved up, falling into step beside him. "I have a couple of tickets —" he said softly.

He did not know that he was speaking to a man on a quest, a man who would have paid whatever he might ask for the slips of paper in his hand — They were not mere symphony tickets he sold. They were tickets to the fields of the sun. He asked five dollars for them; he might have got fifty.

Eldridge slipped them into his pocket. He stepped back into the hall. "I shall not need those tickets," he said.

The man in the window glanced at

him, indifferent, and crossed out a name.

All the way home Eldridge's heart laughed. Would she like it? . . . She had played so softly . . . she would listen like that — and he would be with her. . . . He could not keep the tickets in his pocket. He took them out and looked at them — two plain blue slips with a few black marks on them. . . . And he had thought of it himself! — It was not Mr. Eldridge Walcott's money that bought them for her. . . . Would she understand it was not money — ?

She took them from him with half-pleased face — "For the Symphony?" she said.

"I thought you might — we — might like it —"

She looked at them a minute. "I never went to a symphony —"

"Nor I —" He laughed a little. "I thought we might — try it."

She was still regarding them thoughtfully. "I haven't anything to wear — have I —?" She looked up with the wrinkled line between her eyes.

"Wear your —" He checked it on his tongue. "Get something — There 's a week, you know. You can get something, can't you?"

"Yes, if you think I ought —"

"Of course — get what you need."

She waited thoughtfully. . . . "I have — a dress that might do — with a little changing —" she said.

He saw with a flash, suddenly, the dark attic above them — and a man on his knees staring down at the grey

and shimmering whiteness. "Better get something new, wouldn't you?" said Eldridge.

"Perhaps — I will think — about it."

He could not have told which he wished —— But when, the night of the concert, she came down to him wearing the grey dress and long grey gloves, with the lace falling softly back — he knew in the flash, as he looked at her, that he was glad. . . .

She was buttoning one of the gloves and the long grey coat hung from her arm. She did not look up.

He took it from her and wrapped her in it.

They were going to another world — together. She was going — with him.

There was a little, quiet flush in her face as she sat in the car. Other people were going to the concert, and she looked at them as they came in and sat down.

And Eldridge looked at Rosalind. He did not speak to her. . . . They were going to a new world — and the car was taking them. . . . Bits of talk — color — drifting fragrance as the coats fell back. . . . The woman across the aisle had a bunch of violets. . . .

Why had he not thought to get violets for Rosalind! Would she have liked flowers — ? She seemed a strange Rosalind, sitting beside him in the car in her grey dress — her eyes like little stars. . . . They had three children . . . and a brick house. . . .

The car jolted on. Eldridge would have wished that it might never stop. . . . There would not be another night like this. He could put out his hand and touch mystery. . . . Then he was helping her over the crowded street and they were in the hall — with flowers everywhere — and something close about you that touched you when you moved.

For years afterward he looked back to that Symphony with Rosalind. He had come blindly to a door — as blindly as, when a boy, he had walked in the moonlight — and they had gone in together. They were like children in its strangeness. And as children explore a new field, they went forward. It belonged to them — the lights and

people, and vibrations everywhere. . . . They would go till they came to the end — but there would be no end — always hills stretching beyond, and a wood — something deep, mysterious in that wood. . . . They came to it softly, looking in, and turned back. . . . Once Rosalind had turned and looked at him.

He held that fast — through the weeks and months that went by, through the dull brick streets, he held it fast — for a moment the hidden Rosalind had come to her window and looked out at him and smiled — before she turned away.

XI

THE next day Gordon Barstow had come to see him. The divorce had dragged on. It had not been contested, but there had been delays and consultations and Eldridge had come to know Gordon Barstow well.

He had a kind of keen, vicarious pity for Barstow. Sometimes, as he talked with him and the simple lovableness of the man's nature came up through the uncouthness, he wondered whether Gordon Barstow might not have regained his wife — if he had been determined. But he had let her go; and after the first day he had seemed to take a kind of pleasure in the proceedings.

"I 've been foolish about her," he said, sitting in Eldridge's office. "But I don't want her to suffer because I 've been foolish — and I want to make her an allowance — a good one. I don't want Cordelia should ever be poor."

Eldridge looked at him. "Won't Tower take care of that?" he suggested.

The old man seemed to hold it — "He 'll mean to. He 's honest toward her. I shouldn't let him marry her if he wasn't straight. But I want Cordelia provided for."

And Eldridge suddenly saw that he was thinking of her as a man thinks of his daughter — protectingly. The soreness seemed to have gone out of his hurt. And there was something big in his attitude toward the two who

had wronged him. "Cordelia 's only a child," he said. "I don't believe I 'd 'a' minded so much — if they 'd trusted me. It 's that that hurts, I guess — thinking of the times they must 'a' lied — and I not knowing enough to see anything was wrong."

Yes — it was that that hurt — the times Rosalind had slipped away from him, before he knew — when he hadn't eyes enough to see. He did not mind that she went to Merwin's. Sometimes he was impatient that she did not go oftener. He would watch eagerly for the look in her face that told him that to-day was a Merwin day. . . . He did not mind her going, now that he knew. It was the not knowing that hurt.

Sometimes, lately, he had begun to

wonder whether Rosalind knew that he was there, whether she guessed who it was that came through the swinging doors and sat across the aisle, always a little behind her, and went away before she left her place. . . . He liked to fancy that she knew — and did not mind.

Men and women were not so small as he had made them in his thought. There was room in them generally for life to turn round.

It was this that Gordon Barstow had taught him, he thought. He watched the old man's simple preparations to make Cordelia "well off" with quiet understanding. It was not reparation with him; it was only a steady, clear intention in the old man's thought that the woman he had loved

and who had gone from him should not suffer. . . . "I might have kept her — if I 'd understood quick enough, I guess. I 'm slow — about women," he said.

Then one day he came into the office. Eldridge had sent him word that there were last papers to sign — and the business would be done. He came in slowly, a little pinched with the cold. The wart in the grey-black beard had a bluish look. Eldridge had learned not to look at the half-hidden lump of flesh. He had fancied one day, as his eye rested on it, that the man shrank a little. He had been surprised and he had never looked at it again. It was the curious bluish look to-day that caught his eye an instant.

The old man signed the papers and

pushed them back. "Well, I 'm glad — it 's done." He sat looking at them a minute. "It 's taught me more than I ever knew before," he said. He lifted his eyes a minute to Eldridge. "I 've learned things — thinking about it — and about her —"

He sat without speaking a little time. He had come to trust Eldridge, and he seemed to like to sit quiet like this, at times, without speaking. "I saw a woman to-day," he said, "that made me understand — more than Cordelia has — a woman in at Merwin's —"

Eldridge leaned forward —

"She was sitting there alone," said the old man, "and I see her face — one of these quiet faces — not old and not young. I could 'a' loved her if I 'd

known her when I was younger — I see how she was — she sat so quiet there. Well" — he got up and reached for his hat — "you 've seen me through. Thank you — for what you 've done."

And then he went out and Eldridge looked at his watch — Too late. She would be gone. It was the first time he had missed her — since he knew. He had not thought that Barstow's business would take so long. He gathered up the papers, filing certain ones and addressing others to be mailed. . . . He should miss the old man. He had a feeling underneath his thought, as he sorted the papers and filed them, that he was glad Barstow had sat so long even though he had missed Rosalind. . . . He had seemed to want to stay.

Eldridge filed the last of the papers and looked again at his watch. It was late, but not too late, he decided, to begin the piece of work that had been put off for nearly a week. He became absorbed in it, and it was seven o'clock before he left the office.

The newsboys were shouting extras — as he came out — and he put one in his pocket. He did not open it. Some one took a seat by him in the car and they talked till the car reached home. Then the children claimed him; and after supper he talked a little while with Rosalind.

There was a maid now in the kitchen and Rosalind's hands, he was thinking, as they lay in her lap, were not red and roughened; they had a delicate look. She sat sometimes without

any sewing in them or any fussy work — talking with him or sitting quiet. The first time she had sat so, without speaking, he had felt as if the silence were calling out — shouting his happiness — telling the world that Rosalind trusted him.

He opened the paper and glanced at it — and dropped it — as if he were seeing something.

She looked up. "What is it?" she asked.

He took it up again slowly. "It's a man — I know — Gordon Barstow. They found him dead — in his car this afternoon. It's some one you never knew."

XII

WEEKS passed and she had not gone to Merwin's. For a while Eldridge watched her face and waited for the Merwin look to come. . . . Then he forgot it — for weeks he did not think of it. There had been another concert; they had gone to a play and then to another; and as the spring came on he took her for long drives into the country; sometimes they went with the children, but more often alone. They drove far out in the country and came back at early dusk, the brick houses softly outlined about them.

She could not fail to see that he was devoted to her. Sometimes he brought

a flower and left it on her table; he never gave it to her directly, and there was no response to it. Beyond the one quiet look at the concert, she had given no sign — only that now she would sit with him silent, a long time, as if she did not repel him.

He was working hard and the business had grown. A new class of clients was coming to him — men with big interests — and the work often kept him late at the office. Sometimes he would take supper in town and work far into the evening.

It was late in June that he came home one night and found her sitting alone in the porch — a shadowy figure — as he came up the brick walk.

The day had been warm, but the air had grown cool now and the moon

glimmered over the houses and roofs and on the few trees and shrubs in the yard.

They sat a long time in the porch, talking of the children and of the work he had stayed for and a little about going away for the summer; they had never been away in the summer, but they were going next week. He had tried to send her earlier, when the children were through school, but she had waited, and he had arranged for them all to get away together.

The moon rose high over the roofs and picked out the little lines of vines on the porch and touched her face and hair. She was wearing a light dress, something filmy, that was half in shadow, and his eyes traced the lines of it. She was always myste-

rious, but often now as he looked at her he felt that her guard was down. There were only a few steps more to cross — he began to wonder if he should ever take them — to-night perhaps? Or was he not, after all, the man to win her?

She did not hold him back. It was something in him that waited. He watched, through the moonlight, the vine shadows on her face — and he remembered the night when she lay asleep — and he had watched her face — the stranger's face — close to him . . . and a boy and girl stood in the moonlight and looked at him mistily — and drew back — and his wife swayed a little, rocking in her chair, and her shadow moved on the floor. . . . If he should speak — to her — now —

what would she do? Would the gentle rocking cease? . . .

Then, slowly, a face grew before him. He watched it shape and fade — with its grimness and kindness and a look of pain that lay behind it — old Barstow's face! . . . He knew now — he had come out of the moonlight. . . . To-morrow he would speak to Rosalind — face to face, in the clear light of every day. . . . The wonder of life was hidden in the sun — not in half lights — or moonlight. . . . He was not afraid now. They would go for a long drive — and he would tell her in the sun.

But when he looked at her in the morning he knew that he was not to take her with him out into the coun-

try. It was the Merwin look — a little look of quiet intentness as if she dreamed and would not wake. . . .

He looked at it and turned away. He had not seen the look for weeks, but he knew that he should find her there when he pushed open the swinging doors and went in.

The curtains were drawn a little back and he knew, before he sat down, that she was there — waiting for some one. . . . He had never seen her like this — he had not been sure. He had put the thought from him when it came. But now he knew — she was there waiting for some one, full of happiness. . . . He knew her so well! She could not have a happiness he did not share — and no one should hurt her! His hands half clinched.

He had not thought she would come — again. . . . Why had she come? And this was *his* day — under the sky! . . . He had not thought this day she would come to Merwin's!

Then he waited with her. Whatever Rosalind chose — she should not separate herself from him — or from love. . . . He would wait with her and be glad with her. . . . The strange face — the moonlight face — did not shut him out now. . . .

The swinging doors opened and closed and the man and the woman waited.

The curtains to her alcove were closed; she had reached a hand to them and drawn them together. . . . But she could not shut herself away; he could see her as clearly as if he were

there with her — the bent head and gentle face. The curtains should not shut him out.

He could not have told when it was that it came to him — He lifted his head a minute and looked at it. . . . She was there waiting for some one — she had been waiting, a long time, in her alcove — and he had not stirred!

He got up slowly and looked across to the green curtain — He moved toward it — and put out his hand and — drew back the curtain. . . . She was looking up, smiling — "You were — a long time!" she said.

Her hand motioned to the seat across the table — but he did not take it. He stood looking down at her —

He laid his hat on the table and bent and kissed her.

Her lip trembled a little but she did not speak.

He sat down in the chair opposite and looked at her —— "Well — ?" he said.

She shook the tears from her eyes and smiled through them. "It was a long while!" she said.

XIII

THE man and the woman in the alcove on the right had been talking a long while. Three times the waiter had looked in and withdrawn. If he had stopped long enough he would have seen that it seemed to be the woman who was talking. The man sat silent, one hand shading his eyes and the eyes looking out at her as she talked.

The waiter knew the woman. He had served her — many times. He remembered very well the first day she came to Merwin's — a year ago — more than a year, perhaps. She was alone, and she had stood just inside the

swinging door — looking about her as if she were not used to places like Merwin's — or as if she were afraid. Something had made him think that she was looking for some one — and he had shown her into the third alcove on the right. But no one had come that day. She had come again many times since, and always alone, and there was always a coin on the table in the third alcove waiting for him.

The waiter was a little disappointed to-day. . . . He knew the man — Eldridge Walcott — a lawyer — a good enough sort; but the waiter somehow felt that they had not met until to-day. He had served them both alone — but not together — until to-day. . . . He pushed aside the curtain and looked in.

She was still talking. . . . The man made a little gesture of refusal, and he withdrew. . . .

"It was when Tom sent me the five hundred —" the waiter heard her say as the curtain fell in place.

The man in the alcove behind the curtain was looking at her — "When did Tom send you — five hundred?"

"A year ago — a little more than a year, I think— " She paused to think it out. "He had not sent us anything, you know — not since little Tom was born — ?" She was looking at him, straight ——

His own look did not flinch. "I know — I put it into the business — called it investing it — for Tommie — at six per cent."

She nodded. "Tom never liked it.

I suppose mother told him — that we had not used it to buy things with — the way he meant us to."

"For things you needed," said the man. "I know — I knew then — but I took it." He did not excuse himself — and his eyes did not look away from her. "I was blind," he said softly.

"That was what Tom wrote — when he sent the five hundred. He said that I must spend it on myself — or return it to him. . . . And that I was to tell him just what I bought with it — every penny of it —" She waited a minute.

"Did he say anything else?" asked the man. "Better tell me everything, wouldn't you — Rosalind?"

"He said that he was not setting Eldridge Walcott up in business," she

added after a little minute — and she smiled at him tenderly.

Eldridge returned the look — "We don't mind — now."

"No." . . . They were silent a few minutes. "I thought — at first — I *would* send it back. I wrote to Tom how many things we needed — for the house — and the children — and for everything —"

"What did he say?"

"He asked me if you would *let* me spend it for the house and for the children and for everything — if you knew about it?"

The man's eyes were looking at Mr. Eldridge Walcott, regarding him impartially. "I am glad that you did not let me know."

"Yes. I sent it back — once. But

Tom wrote again — all about when we were children and when he gave me the biggest bites of candy and filled my pail up to the top when we went berrying —— He said it was what had made a man of him — keeping my pail full."

Eldridge winced a little. But she did not stop. "He said he wanted me to spend the money for the little girl *he* knew.

"I didn't spend it — not for a long time, you know. But I kept it and I looked at it — sometimes — and wondered. . . . Then one day I saw a dress — that I liked. I thought it was like me, a little —?" She looked at him ——

He nodded.

"So I got it — and that was the end,

I guess." She laughed tremulously. "Everything kept coming after that. The dress seemed to make me need — *everything!*" She spread out her hands.

Then she sat thinking — and looking at the dress that needed everything. "I wore it at first just at home — when I was alone. I would put it on and sit down and fold my hands — and think of things . . . about Tom and about being a little girl — and about mother. I was always rested when I took it off . . . and when the children came in from school and you came home, I could bear things better." . . .

He reached out a hand and touched hers where it lay on the table. . . . He had said that he should touch it —

some time. He stroked it a minute and she went on.

"Then I came here —" She made a little gesture. "I didn't know what it was like — I didn't even know there was a place like this." She glanced around the alcove that sheltered them — with its folds of green curtain — "But as soon as I came, I knew I should come again. I knew it would take care of me — the way Tom wanted for me. So I spent the money." She lifted the little linked purse from the table — she laughed. "Only fifty cents left — You 're here just in time!"

Eldridge held out his hand. "Give it to me."

She looked at him.

"I want it — yes. Aren't you will-

ing to give me fifty cents — of your five hundred?"

She handed it to him with a little sigh of relief.

He took it and balanced it thoughtfully in his hand — "Why did you come to-day?" he asked.

"This is my anniversary day."

"To-day?"

She nodded — as if she saw a vision. "It is a year to-day that I came here — the first time."

"Alone — ?" The word breathed itself — and stopped, and Eldridge put out a hand. "Don't tell me! I did not ask it."

"Don't you know?" She was looking at him.

"Yes, I know. I do not understand — but I know."

She smiled and sat silent. . . . "I was frightened to come!" It seemed as if she were looking at the strangeness of it. "I was afraid — the first day —"

"You should have asked me to come," he urged.

"Would you have come?"

"No — not then."

"And I had to come! I could not wait — and there was — no one. . . . You would not have come — not even if I had waited."

"No — I should not have come — except to find you. . . . Tell me, have you never been afraid of me — of what I would do?"

"The first day — yes — I was terribly frightened when you came in and sat over there," she moved her

hand. "I wanted to scream out — to go to you and tell you what it meant, and beg you not to be angry. . . . I had never done anything without you before. I was like a child! Then you went out and I hurried home. I tore off the things. I did not mind your knowing. I only wanted you to understand. I was afraid you might not — understand."

"I didn't —"

"No — I know. But after a while — I knew you were trying to. . . . Then I knew that some day we should be here — together."

The little alcove seemed to expand and become a wide place — Eldridge caught a glimpse of something fine and sincere — it passed like a breath over her face and was gone.

She lifted the face — "I have waited for it," she said. "I have prayed for it every day, I think." Her lips barely moved the words — "I did not want to feel alone here."

He pushed back the curtain and beckoned to the waiter. "We will drink to the day," he said.

Eldridge gave his order and looked on, smiling, while the waiter placed the slender-necked flask on the table and brought out the glasses and withdrew.

They lifted the glasses. "To the day — you left me," he said. "And to the day I followed you," he added slowly.

The glass paused in her hand. "That was the Symphony — ?"

"Yes — And to your anniversary!"

She set down the glass. "I have not told you everything. It was not — my anniversary — made me come — to-day."

"No?"

She shook her head. "I came — to meet — you!" she said.

He looked at her slowly — "And when did you know that I would come?" he asked.

"Last night — in the moonlight. I was so afraid you would speak there — in the moon! I did not want the moon to get in," she said. "I wanted you to speak in real, plain daylight — and then, of course, you know, it 's Tom's gown and not the moon. Everybody has the moon!" she laughed.

"This is a very little place, this alcove," said Eldridge. He was looking

about him at the green walls of the alcove — thinking of the sun and the fields and of the road up through the hills —

"But it 's where I went berrying with Tom," she laughed.

He smiled at her. "Then it is as big as the world — and the sun and all the fields of the sun!" he said.

Outside the curtain the music tinkled dimly, and there was a lower music still of all the glasses and words — and there was a silence in the alcove.

"So there has never been any one — any one but me —" he said, "in your alcove!" He was looking at her happily.

"No." Her lip waited on it — and closed. "There *was* some one —"

she spoke slowly. "It seems a queer thing to tell. It had no beginning and no end!" She waited, still looking at it. . . . "It was a man — an old man — that used to sit over there to the left, at a table by himself. I could see him through the curtains. Even when they were almost closed I could see him. He always sat there, and always alone. . . . I did not notice him at first. . . . I do not think any one would have noticed him — at first. He was almost ugly — or he seemed ugly." She was smiling at her thought. . . . "And one day suddenly I saw him as he really was, as he was inside — very gentle and strong and wise — and not wanting to hurt any one or to let any one suffer — more than they had to. I knew, some way,

if I should go up to him and speak to him, that he would understand me — and help me. I should have liked to — speak to him. Of course it is really the same as if I did." . . . She seemed thinking of it. "But I didn't. I never saw him more than a dozen times, I suppose. But I used to think about him, and it helped me. I should have trusted him anywhere — and been willing to go with him — anywhere in the world. I don't believe he was very clever — but it rested me to think of him — just as a big, homely field rests you — and the way the music did that first night — when we knew each other ——"

After a minute she went on. "I have not seen him for a long time. He stopped coming suddenly. . . .

There was one day — when he went out — he looked at me. I almost thought he would stop. . . . I was frightened — and glad! And he went on. I have not seen him since. . . ."

Outside the glasses and plates clicked. The violin sounded softly through the murmuring words. "And yet there was nothing to tell him," she said, "except — that I was waiting — for you."

He looked in her eyes — Far within them something was coming to him — the sun lay on a thousand fields, and the little alcove was very still.

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